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43. 1259.

43. 1259.

PREFACE.

The following Tragedy owes its origin to the celebrated French Drama of Lucretia Borgia, a representation of which I chanced to witness, several years ago, in Paris; but, beyond the general outline and conduct of his play, and the names of its characters, my obligations to M. Hugo are neither great nor numerous; and such, indeed, as they are, I know not whether they have not been attended with a more than counteracting disadvantage to any trouble which they may be supposed to have saved me,—for no considerable work was ever yet written to the thoughts of another man; and I cannot but feel conscious that the attempt to engraft, even this slight production, upon a foreign stem, has been accompanied by a certain want of flexibility and ease from which it might, under other circumstances, haply have been free.

By changing the catastrophe, and wholly omitting, or passing lightly over, some of the most offensive incidents of the French play, I would fain hope that the emotions excited by this tragedy will be found to be of that nature only upon which it is the proper province of tragedy to operate; for horror, not less than terror, is a just ingredient of the sublime; but between the horrible and the revolting there unluckily exists no wider interval than that which is proverbially said to separate the sublime from the ridiculous. To have halted upon that narrow isthmus, and by the aid of the popular belief, and perhaps their own, in the doctrine of an inevitable destiny, to have so dramatized the hideous history of the Houses of Atreus and Œdipus as that their plays upon those subjects should not have excited a single sensation of disgust either in the minds of those that witnessed or of us who distantly read them, was at once the glory and distinguishing privilege of the tragic poets of Greece. That illustrious example of antiquity it necessarily lies beyond the power of a modern dramatist to avail himself of; for though it would be easy for him to describe his unfortunate or guilty characters

as votaries of the same creed, he would require an audience of Predestinarians to sympathize with, or even tolerate the expression of such opinions. Poor, however, as such an expedient would undoubtedly be in a drama destined for the stage, the belief, or rather the attempt to encourage a belief, in an overruling and inevitable fatality, seems so consentaneous to bosoms contemplating the commission of great crimes, that I have not hesitated to ascribe to my chief personages that fault or folly which Scaliger, suspecting in Cardan, who had cast the horoscope of our Saviour, knew not whether to censure or smile at:—"Impiam dicam magis an jocularem audaciam quæ et Dominum stellarum stellis subjecerit?"

For the atrocious sentiments, sophistical opinions, and frequent instances of coarse phraseology, that will be found in this Play, I trust that it will not be considered an inadequate apology to state that I have not, in a single instance, put a thought into the minds, or an expression into the mouths of my characters, which I did not judge to be suitable to their own turpitude, and to the rudeness of the times in which they are supposed to have lived.

Nor will the darkest horror of its plot be found to want a warrant for its probability in the history of a later age; for the frightful fate of M. de Villiers, the son, by M. de Gersay, of the notorious Ninon de l'Enclos, will be familiar to most readers; and Le Sage, by founding upon it a well-known story in Gil Blas, has sufficiently shewn that he did not deem it unfitted for the purposes of fiction.

I have only to add that the murder of the Duke of Gandia, which is narrated in the first Act, forms the subject of a long Italian extract, appended to one of Lord Byron's Poems; and that I have given to the names of some of my characters, rather such a rhythmical quantity as appeared most agreeable to English lips, than what I am told to be their proper pronunciation in their own tongue.

H. T. W.

ALBANY, *December*, 1842.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

DON ALPHONSO D'ESTE, *Duke of Ferrara.*

GENNARO, *a Foundling.*

GUBETTA, *Minister to Donna Lucretia Borgia.*

MAFFIO,
OLOFERNO,
ASCANIO,
JEPPO,
} *Noble Romans in the Service of Venice.*

RUSTIGHELLO.

APOSTOLO.

DONNA LUCRETIA BORGIA, *Duchess of Ferrara.*

SCENE—VENICE, FERRARA.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.

A Terrace in front of the Barbarigo Palace at Venice; the Palace and Gardens are illuminated as during a night in the Carnival. Enter GENNARO, MAFFIO, OLOFERNO, ASCANIO, JEPPO, *and* GUBETTA.

OLOFERNO.

O Sirs, we are fall'n on days so full of faults,
So stuff'd with strange unnatural misdeeds,
Monstrous perversions of a world decay'd
And 'bout to bring the Eternal finish forth;
One of 'em scarce can
O'ertop the level horrors of the age,
Being giants all. Yet was that
An arch abomination, a crown'd crime,
Peeping o'er subject sins.

ASCANIO.

Actors, and act—
All's mystery to me.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.

A Terrace in front of the [illegible] Palace at [illegible], the Palace and Garden [illegible] night in the Carnival. [illegible] OLOFERNO, ASCANIO, [illegible]

[illegible]

O Sirs, we are full [illegible]
So stuff'd with [illegible]
Monstrous perverse [illegible]
And 'bout to bring the [illegible]
One of 'em scarce [illegible]
O'ertop the level [illegible]
Being giants all. [illegible]
An arch abomination [illegible]
Peeping o'er subject [illegible]

[illegible]

All's mystery to me. [illegible]

JEPPO.

Mystery, Ascanio?
The thing's as clear as mid-day. Mystery!
Wouldst have the mist dispell'd? Why, I will make you
Eye-witness to the fact; the doubting'st judge
That ere believed his Bible, and no more
Should hang the criminal on your depose,
Nor sleep a whit the worse for't? You must know,
I have an uncle, Cardinal Carriali,
A learned man in scandals of such sort
And very pungent prelate. He it was
That pass'd that excellent mockery on Riario
I' the matter o' the war with Charles the Eighth:
The thing, you see, grew thus; the Cardinal
Being on the very point——

GENNARO.

To tell a tale
As pointless as thy own. Well, man, get on—
The mystery or the mockery, one or both—
I'm tired already; 'twill be poppies to me,
And eke a nightcap.

MAFFIO.

Noble Gennaro,
These Roman tales of ours, which touch us nearly,
(Although the Doge doth command our swords,)
Fall coldly on thy ear, and find no chord.

JEPPO.

Nor marvel either; Gennaro was a foundling,
Turn'd on the world's wide common at his birth,
By those that brought him into 't.

MAFFIO.

Ay, but Gennaro,
Foundling albeit, good Jeppo, as thou say'st,
Doth differ in this point from some of us,
That he hath penn'd a patent, with his sword,
Of such nobility as might make blush
A race that ran to Adam. Gallant Gennaro!
Confrere in arms, and friend of many battles;
Believe me, Sir, I use
No phrase of toasts and flush'd companionship,
Post-prandial eloquence, the child of wine,
As lasting as the liquor that begets it,
But say, with my whole soul,
The dearest day that ever dawn'd on Maffio
Was that when Gennaro vow'd himself his friend—
In life and death, his friend. And then that old,
Grey-headed good-for-nothing—the hoar rogue
That in Palermo told us we should die
Both on one day, and in the self-same place—
Heav'n send it so! Say I not well, mon brave?
Ah, Gennaro!
What boots the passing, or the past of life,
Or the still-shrouded future, so there be
Men to make war with, women for our love,

And wine that glads man's heart? But I delay
Sage Jeppo's tale; Ascanio and I
Have heard it but in part; pray you proceed.

GENNARO.

Well, wake me when 'tis over.

(*Throws himself on a bench at the back of the stage, and sleeps.*)

JEPPO.

Thus it runs, then;
I' the year '80——

GUBETTA.

The year '87.

JEPPO.

True, true—'twas '87; said I not that?
I' the year '87, one Wednesday night——

GUBETTA.

Tuesday——

JEPPO.

Was 't Tuesday? Well, I think it was;
I' the year '87, one Tuesday night,
The place being a close corner, near the church
Of Saint Geronymo, the hour towards four o'clock,
But dark as deepest Erebus, a boatman——

OLOFERNO.

Your pardon, Jeppo, this is no fit theme
For jocund nights like this; 'twill chill our mirth

To iciest melancholy; let us call
Another conversation. Who remark'd
Fair Florentine to-night?

ASCANIO.

Nay, Oloferno,
Baulk us not thus—I fain would hear this tale;
'Twill put our manhood to the gauge to listen;
Come, be thyself its teller—'twill more suit
With thy grave lip than Jeppo's.

OLOFERNO.

You will wish
It had remain'd untold; but have your way:
'Twas on the night, then, ye have heard from Jeppo,
The place being that he hath narrated to ye,
That a poor boatman, one George Schiavoni,
Who, from a vessel's deck moor'd i' the Tiber,
Watch'd certain merchandise, beheld a sight
That made his blood run cold. Two cavaliers,
Muffled and mask'd, that turn'd at every step
Their faces o'er their shoulders, as though some
Strong terror dogg'd their heels, approach'd the place
Near where the vessel lay. Next came two more,
And then three others follow'd, seven in all.
One of the company bestrode a steed
Black as the night he rode in, on whose quarters
The boatman clearly saw, so close he came,
A human corpse, flung crosswise, the head hanging

Down on one side, the legs upon the other,
Pillion of pale mortality. The rider
Back'd his horse to the brink, and while the rest
Kept keenest watch at every point that none
O'erpeep'd the unholy deed, the muffled twain
Grasp'd the poor carcase, one on either side;
And, weighing it an instant on their arms,
So all their force to gather for the fling,
Heaved it into the stream. For a brief moment,
But which within itself did hold an age,
For so time paused, his wing with horror laden;
The horseman listen'd to the splashing voice
Of the vex'd water, in whose hiding lap
From every eye but One, for ever pass'd
The unsuspected corpse; then, with stretch'd hand,
Pointing to some large object on the surface,
Demanded what it was? One of the twain,
In a low whisper, pitch'd to murder's key,
That through the smooth and ebon pall of night
Pierced like a sword, made answer—
"May it please Monseigneur"—mark ye well the phrase—
"It is Monseigneur's mantle"—which, scarce said,
He seized a massive stone, and, with just aim,
Striking the floating tell-tale, drove it deep
'Neath the secreting stream. Their dark deed done,
That guilty company, no more words spoke,
Turn'd from the river's bank, taking the road
That leads to the cathedral.

MAFFIO.

A strange story!
And who was he they threw into the stream?

ASCANIO.

Post equitem sedet atra cura;
The incident of the horse most moves my mind;
Death on the croupe, and Murder in the selle.

GUBETTA.

That horse, Sirs, bore two brothers.

OLOFERNO.

He has said it;
Señor de Belverana speaks the truth.

GUBETTA.

Would ye know further? I can gratify ye.
The name of the dead rider was John Borgia—
The living one was Cæsar.

MAFFIO.

Heav'ns! what a race
Of demons are these Borgias!

ASCANIO.

And the cause
Of such foul fratricide?—doth so far stretch
Your knowledge, noble Spaniard?

OLOFERNO.

Name it not,
I charge thee—name it not, De Belverana!

It is too monstrous for the tongue of man
To tell and blister not; the very ear
Would crack that heard such horrors.

GUBETTA.

Nevertheless,
Ascanio shall hear it, since he wishes:
Marry, the brothers, Sir, were learned men,
And better loved the fashions of the free
And uncanonical antiquity,
Than the nice notions of succeeding times;
Acorns and liberty to them were more
Than the fine housed meal of modern days
And long preluding grace; and from their tastes,
Truly their troubles grew; for bitter Fate,
That ever makes its standing jest of man,
Had mischievously married both their hearts
To the same fair——

MAFFIO.

And she was——

GUBETTA.

Lucrece Borgia!

OLOFERNO.

Even so, Ascanio—Maffio, even so:
It could be none but her, Lucretia Borgia,
The foul incestuous strumpet! Oh, how worse
Than bitterest gall it is for one that hath
A drop of Roman liquor in his veins,

To name that hated name! De Belverana,
There breathes not one in all this company—
Ascanio, Maffio, Jeppo, or myself—
But what hath borne some wrong, some grievous
wrong,
In his own person, or the persons of
Those whom he loved a thousand times more dearly,
At that fell woman's hand.

GUBETTA.

'Tis not unlikely;
The Borgia doth not bear offences meekly.

JEPPO.

But was there not a something, noble Spaniard,
Even more flagitious still? A whisper'd horror,
But not the less distinct,—a hellish rumour,
Yet universal,—that——

GUBETTA.

That Lucrece Borgia
Was mother, yet no wife? So wouldst thou say,
Did not thy modesty confound thy speech.
Well, I can satisfy your thirst for knowledge
On that point too. The lady bore a son;
Were he now living, Jeppo, he would have
About your own of years, or scarce so many;
His age, I think, would better tally with
That of your sleeping friend, the valiant Gennaro,
Being, as I should judge, the youngest of ye.

MAFFIO.

Señor de Belverana, I shall thank you
Not to mix up a name so bright as that
With such abominations.

GUBETTA.

I am silent;
Nathless the youth would have about his years.

OLOFERNO.

And since a Spanish stranger seems to know
More of these monstrous mysteries, that wrap
With such Tartarean gloom the line of Borgia,
Than we born Romans do, I would fain ask
Señor de Belverana—can he tell us
Whither, since, on some foul and midnight end,
A month ago, 'tis said, she left Ferrara,
Her hated steps have turn'd?

GUBETTA.

That can I do
Nor ye delight to hear. One city holds
The Borgia and yourselves.

MAFFIO.

Borgia in Venice!
The Duchess of Ferrara here in Venice!
Then by mine honour, Signiors,—ye may think
It shames me to avow it, but for one,—
I breathe a freer air to think that we
Shall leave it o' the morrow.

OLOFERNO.

I'm not sorry.

JEPPO.

Enough, enough of horrors and the Borgia.
Signiors, I've news for ye, important news:
If we stay here much longer, they'll drink all
That rare Greek wine without us.

ASCANIO.

Well thought on, Jeppo!
Thou hast not said so wise a thing to-night.
Come, Signiors,
Let's to the wine, and fico for the Duchess.
[*Exeunt* ASCANIO, OLOFERNO, JEPPO, *and* MAFFIO.

GUBETTA.

Ay, Sirs, a Spanish stranger doth know more—
(So that he were a stranger and a Spaniard)
Than ye born Romans do—for that is nothing.
But there's another that knows more than I,
And that's Lucretia Borgia;
And there's another that knows more than she,
And that's her brother Cæsar;
And there's another that knows more than he,
And that's the Pope, their Father;
Marry, if there be any doth know more
Of the mystery of iniquity than the Pope doth,
'Tis the foul fiend himself; so ends my climax.
Well, I am happy, not being curious,

Nor would a ducat part with to obtain
Knowledge of things that end in being known.
Car of Ezekiel, the undying bone,
Four-flowing rivers that have rise in God,
Tetrasyllabic treasures and hard things,
That splenetic Spagiricals have made soft
Their brains with searching for and never found—
For there was nothing in them but the name.
I am Gubetta, not Mirandula,
And would as lieve the one be knowing nothing,
As I would be the other and know all things!

Enter LUCRETIA BORGIA, &c.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Gubetta!—

GUBETTA.

May it please my Lady Duchess,
Your dog doth not now answer to that name;
'Twere too well known, i' faith, to be known here.
I am a certain Spaniard for the nonce,
Señor de Belverana, at your service.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Is 't talk'd that I'm in Venice?

GUBETTA.

That her Grace
The Duchess of Ferrara hath arriv'd here,
Pass'd all the wit of man to keep a secret;

Nor have I therefore studied to conceal it.
Your person, as I gather, few have note of,
Save certain Romans who were here anon;
'Twere well that it remain'd so.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Wherefore well?
Venice is friend to Rome and to Ferrara.

GUBETTA.

Yet may there be in Venice those that are
No friends to Borgia. Would your Grace know why?
A certain odour that is not of musk
Waits on the name of Borgia, wanting here
The means to make men swear it is a sweet one.
'Tis *oderint dum metuant* in Ferrara.
Let the knaves hate that tremble; here in Venice
Some hate that tremble not.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Then I'm no Borgia.

GUBETTA.

Your Grace's parentage was never doubted;
But for this Venice, madam, pray you have it
In your consideration 'tis a hive
That swarms with all the wasps of Italy,
And some stray stings beside.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

And Italy—
All Italy abhors me! O Gubetta,
The land that should have loved and honour'd me
While I was living, and mix'd up my name,
Wet with her tears, when I had ceased to live,
'Mong her dead daughters—great Cornelia,
And Brutus' worthy wife, and Cæsar's mother—
The wombs that bare the sons that made earth Romans—
She doth so execrate me, as I were
Rather the mischieful and mighty fiend
Than one of her own children.—Well, let that pass;
'Tis waste to talk where is no way to act;
He that can all things do can nothing undo;
Who mends the future doth best mourn the past.
Where's Galeas Accaioli?

GUBETTA.

In his dungeon;
Your Grace hath sign'd his passport to the block,
But left the day unfill'd.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Where's Curzola,
Baron of Buondelmonte?

GUBETTA.

In his dungeon;
Your Grace was pleased to say that you would issue

The warrant for the Signior to be strangled
When you arrived in Venice.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Where's the Lord
Of Spadacappa?

GUBETTA.

He's at large at present;
Your Grace was of opinion that the poison
Might most commodiously be administer'd
In the great Christmas festival at Ferrara.
Diavolo! the man will die a Nestor;
Thirty years old, and eight whole months to live!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Where's Peter Capra, that we trusted so,
Bishop of Pesaro?

GUBETTA.

The Holy Father,
Upon your Grace's charge, hath taken charge
Of Capra and his fortunes. He inhabits
A meek and apostolical apartment,
A hundred feet beneath the Vatican.
Let your Grace give the word, and this new Peter,
That ten times thrice had lied yet never wept,
Returns to the poor powder that he sprang from.
A single ounce of it was all time left
Of the great Carthaginian, and he,
Weigh'd i' the scale of fame with his one dust,
Had balanced, Heav'n but knows how many
bishops!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

It shall be, and be quickly; good resolves
Wane with the keeping of them, and their cost
More moves us than their merit. Gubetta,
Let Accaioli and Buondelmonte
Be straightway set at liberty; let no harm
Light upon Spadacappa; see that the Pope
Be in our name requested to restore
Pesaro to his see, unharm'd alike
In person and in purse: and to do nought
By the poor half, halting 'twixt good and ill,
But all things throughly—
Get smiths, and strike the fetters suddenly off
From hands of all that for no other sin
Than suit of ours lie i' the gaols of Rome,
Ferrara, and Spoletta.

GUBETTA.

Do I hear rightly,
Or are my senses 'prison'd by a dream
From which I cannot wake, yet know to be one?
Well, dreams go by the contrary; 'tis my comfort.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Go not thou, too, by contrary, but so do.

GUBETTA.

So leave undone, I think your Grace must mean.
What! loose Accaioli and Buondelmonte,
That gibed your Highness' person? Let escape

The Lord of Spadacappa, that denied
His fief was of Spoletta, and refus'd
The sums it pleas'd you levy on his land?
Free the false, perjur'd prelate, that for gold
(The vessel of his fealty and his fear,
By the absorbing avarice swallow'd up,)
Betray'd to Sicily your secret'st plans
And took a fee from France to thwart your marriage?
And, oh, most strange of all!—oh, most beyond
Conjecture's compassing!—like new-crown'd King,
Or vulgar viceroy, that for the base breath
Of the beast multitude, and noisome smacks
Of unwash'd hands, to lift him o'er his peers,
Doth of his offal nature vilely yearn,
With one large word unlock the prison doors,
And make the gaoler's job a sinecure!
Your Grace is in a merry mood to-day.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Merry or mournful one, what matters that
To thee, Gubetta? Do as I enjoin!

GUBETTA.

Enjoining so, God send you may not grieve!
Madam, I do entreat you to give time
To this new fantasy, that thought may weigh
What thoughtless impulse out of hand would act.
All things are adverse to it; most your life

By mercy made less sure, for wrongs impos'd
Beget more vengeance in the heart of man
Redeem'd than they can cancel, and grace falls
Not on good grounds alone but stony places.
Compassion is a weakness in a king
And mighty sceptres turn to gilded sticks
In hands that wield them not wherewith to break
The stubborn pates of those that bow not down.
Suspicion and her shadow, which is death,
Make tyrants terrible whom fear makes safe:
Great Cæsar doubted Cassius; had he quench'd
His doubts in Cassius' blood, Cæsar had lived;
That crushing not the snake beneath his heel
Was for his proper folly fitly slain.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Are all men serpents then?

GUBETTA.

He'll not be stung,
At least, that thinks them so.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

That will not I,
But love with peril purchase. Faithful Gubetta!

GUBETTA.

Your Grace, for fifteen years, hath had no cause
To doubt that I have been so.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Nor now doubt it;
Mine oldest, ablest counsellor! Come hither to me:

I'd speak with thee—speak very frankly with
thee.
Doth never thought, Gubetta, never wish—
A little lurking wish, less own'd than felt,
For zeal of friends—the general good word,
Kinsmen's affection, or the single love
That should hoard up its heart's whole wealth in
thee,
Come over thee, and like a gentle rain
That doth the long-constringing winter end
Thaw thee into a man? O, my Gubetta!
When thievish time hath clotted the thick blood,
Unedged the subtle soul, and to a piece
Of shivering and shrunk flesh, that lacks the
strength
To minister to its own exigencies
These forceful frames reduced, who would fain
Pass the poor lag and leavings of his days
Robb'd of all reverence, garnish'd with no grace
Of goodly memories that best gild grey hairs;
But i' the worldly estimation be
As pitiful, poor, and loathly as he is
In his own sense of being? Mine old servant,
Pray you deal soothly with me.

GUBETTA.

Soothly, then,
I think your Grace is in the way to be
A very godly Grace.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Iron-hearted man!
Can nothing shake thy soul? Being made of flesh
Thou canst not, but must feel; feeling, must loathe
To think what thou art thought!

GUBETTA.

Use, Madam, use!
'Tis use doth fit the burthen to the back:
The strong Crotonian bore the cow at last
That daily bore the calf. I have too long
Been *digito monstrarier*, finger-mark'd,
Of the world's obloquy, not to have learn'd to wear
My wreath of honours meekly.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Lov'st thou no one?

GUBETTA.

To love another not being lov'd again
Is misery; to command another's love
Passes our reach of power; to be the cause
Of our own misery is to be a fool;
Ergo is love a folly. Doth your Grace
Love any, may it please you?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Slave, scoff not!
Or, by mine hopes of the life after this,
Thy head shall pay the gibe! I tell thee, hound,

'Tis no rash fantasy, such as in weak souls
And unresolving, ever on the veer,
Doth of its own engendering's very heat
Spring to its full of stature, now works in me;
Lay thy hand on my heart, life's pendulum,
With what a measur'd movement it gives forth
The seconds of existence: 'twere not thus
Itched passion i' the vein——

(*Seeing* GENNARO.)

Either mine eyes
Fool me, or I behold him;—is't of flesh,
Or but a cloud-wrought shape, that fancy doth
'Wilder my reason with? Such things have been,
And pass'd for very palpable. So, to solve it—

(*She approaches, and touches him.*)

O bliss! substantial bliss! Who said thou wert
In Venice did not lie?

GUBETTA.

Why, what a dull
And pointless wit was mine, that pierced not this,
And what was midnight turn'd into mid-day!
Love hath prov'd preacher, then, and in the flesh
Is't that she's born again!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

How deep a sleep
Seals up his ports of vision, o'er light's holes
Dropping the 'cullis lids.

GUBETTA.

To all things else
She sleeps as sound in mind as he in body;
Well, 'tis her lord's look-to-it, and not mine,
The jealous Duke that dares not sleep o' nights,
Lest he should wake, and find his wife a truant.
Doth your Grace know the boy? She hears me not,
Being all turn'd to eye. Madam, the youth
Thou look'st on loves another.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

How know'st thou?

GUBETTA.

By a slight token, but not less a sure one:
As I stood by to-night, what time the pipe
Quicken'd the light-heel'd dance, a silent one,
Yet, why I know not, scarce unpleas'd spectator,
A gentle girl, some seventeen summers old,
Blooming herself as summer, i' the maze
Chanc'd cross him of the measure. Their swift eyes,
With undirected mutual instinct mov'd
Met in a full encounter; the girl smiled,
Then blush'd, then smil'd again, then dropp'd her orbs
From the confront of his, that still gaz'd on,
Even as he pass'd away. I could have sworn
The pretty pair were lovers.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

A fair girl?

GUBETTA.

Ay, Madam, passing fair she seem'd to me.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Heaven send him constant then to think her so!

GUBETTA.

O meek, unselfish wish! There's bottom here
Outruns my rope to fathom; a month back
It had been poison, or the nunnery
For one that dar'd come 'twixt her love and her.
Sooth, but your Grace doth play the sphinx to-day!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Time will be Œdipus. Gubetta, leave me
And make my orders actions.

[*Exit* GUBETTA.

Beautiful boy!
Had I ne'er seen thee waking, loveliest, in
The sleep that now enfolds thee life's half-owner,
Let me take hold of this unconscious hand
And make it piece with mine. Would that I knew
On what phantasmic shore of golden thoughts
Thine unimprison'd soul keeps holiday,
That I might meet it there, teaching my fancy
To wing a flight like thine. See how his lips
Part with a new-born smile, and a calm glow
Such as doth brighten good men's close of breath

Makes sunset of his aspect,
And tender as the down of angel's wings,
Lies the soft flesh upon his sleeping cheek!
Slumber on, boy!
I'll watch the while, that if the changeful hand
Of the capricious Morpheus, king of dreams,
With chilling clouds o'ercomes thy vision's noon
I may straight wake thee! Get thee gone, fool mask!

(*She throws down her mask which she has hitherto carried in her hand and sits down beside* GENNARO. *Enter unseen by her, the* DUKE, *followed by* RUSTIGHELLO.)

DUKE.

Proof—proof, by Heaven!—plain proof she is a whore,
And I am—what it doth not need to mention!
See, how she hugs his hand! O jade, jade,
How dearly have I lov'd thee! Come hither, sirrah!
Thou see'st yon strumpet? Canst tell how it is—
What end doth answer, save to make men sin—
Being so bawdy, she should be so fair?

RUSTIGHELLO.

Not I, i' faith, my lord.

DUKE.

Neither can I;

And yet there is a Providence in all things:
Know'st how they call the minion?

RUSTIGHELLO.

As I hear
From certain Signiors of his company
His name is Gennaro, a poor hireling blade,
That hath no grace of birth.

DUKE.

Serves he the State?

RUSTIGHELLO.

Ay, Sir, in time of war; but three or four
In these same slack and dullard days of peace,
Have a week's licence, that they mean to spend
Sight-seeing in Ferrara.

DUKE.

Oh, rare goat!
Plump i' the lion's mouth—a generous goat
And one that hath a smack of honour in him!
Hell, trouble not thyself to heap his coals
For I'll have store of 'em prepar'd for him!
Come, Sir, we'll first be there; Oh, they had cause
That set me to the following her.

[*Exeunt.*

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

If he knew me—
Let me look on that picture—If he knew me!
To be loath'd there as all the world doth loathe me!
No, no! he hath not heart for't;

In all his composition is not gall
To bruise an innocent worm. But am I innocent,
And sans offence like that? Oh, that mankind
Might drink th' oblivious stream and the to-come
Blot out the been of time!
So shouldst thou know of me but what I would
Untold my past of life! Thou wilt not hate
Her who so loves thee, boy? Silence is Yes;
And this, to seal the bond.

(She bends over him, and kisses his forehead; he wakes, and seizes her hand.)

GENNARO.

Whom have we here?
By Heav'n, a woman! and a very fair one:
Why this is Alain Chartier o'er again
That went to bed alone and when he woke,
Found that a Queen had stolen on his sleep
And lock'd him in a prison of sweet arms!
Nay, lady, by your leave—who throws the glove
Needs bide the battle's brunt.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Let go mine hand!

GENNARO.

So that thy lips will be its hostages!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Thus, then, I gain my freedom!

[Wrests her hand from him, and exit.

GENNARO.

A short-lived one.

[*Exit after her.*

Enter, from the opposite side, OLOFERNO, MAFFIO, ASCANIO, *and* JEPPO.

OLOFERNO.

My life upon it, but it was the Borgia!
I look'd upon her with as full an eye
As now I look on thee. She hath no peer
In beauty, as in crime.

ASCANIO.

They darted off,
As though some secret and desir'd discourse
Were broke by our approach!

JEPPO.

He cannot know her!

MAFFIO.

But straightly shall. The dearest friend I have
Were my worst enemy lov'd he that fair fiend
Even with the passingst passion's appetite.
Let's follow them, or ere the witching hag
Hath time to wreck him!

OLOFERNO.

She's the veriest syren!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A more retired part of the Gardens; the lights of the Palace are seen through the trees as at a distance. Enter LUCRETIA BORGIA, *and, immediately after,* GENNARO.

GENNARO.

Fair fugitive, stay and parley! There's none here
Save thou and I and darkness!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Doth none hear us?

GENNARO.

None, sweetest, save the stars, and they'll keep counsel!
They and the buxom moon that had no fears
When she upon the conscious Latmian hill
With bless'd Endymion lay! Come, I would change
The kiss thou gav'st me! Being pass'd i' the dark
'Tis odds but it were bad.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Rather retain it;
For my heart went together with my lips
And of the twain 'twas born!

GENNARO.

Hath 't no twin-sister
To parallel its sweet self?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Leave these light words—
Beseech thee, leave these words; they fill me with
Feelings thou canst not fathom. Yet thou think'st
That thou couldst love me, boy?

GENNARO.

Could love thee, lady!
How cold a query when the theme is love
And the bright querist thou! Pray you to try me!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

I do not ask thy heart, for that's another's
That hath not half my years.

GENNARO.

What wouldst have then?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

I'd have thee feel towards me as thou hadst
Known me from infancy—as though the first
Of thy young thoughts back-running memory finds
Were of some little pleasure I had wrought thee
Sweeter than largest after ones; I would be
'Mongst thy mind's habitants as the fond kind nurse
Had carried thee; coax'd thee with hushing tales,
Oft baulk'd thy humours, yet not chidingly
But only of her fears; taught thee thy prayers,
And how to crook thy knees, how build thy hands,
I' the uttering them; was to thee i' the place

Of the lost trunk and fountain of thy life
That thou didst never see.

GENNARO.

Where's the hot blood
That did with such a quick and filling tide
Course through my ridgy veins? Queen-seeming stranger,
What's i' thy words that they should have such power
More than the natural?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

'Tis an honest power
Come it from where it will. Hast ever wish'd
That thou hadst known thy mother?

GENNARO.

What a thrill
Shoots through me with that word! Mysterious being!
Majestic as mysterious—fair as both—
I do adjure thee, answer me, Did'st thou know her?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Even as she knew herself; she was a woman
Being much sinn'd against had done much sin;
But they that told her evil nothing told
Of the offence that caus'd it.

GENNARO.

My poor mother!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Bless thee for speaking of her in such tone!
I am sure thou wouldst have loved her, hadst thou
known her.

GENNARO.

Oh, tell me of her—
Beseech thee tell me of her! On my knees,
I do implore thee tell me all thou knowest
Of her whom I am part of! Oh, how often—
How earnestly, yet ever to no end,
Have I entreated of the rugged hind
With whom I pass'd my years, till the last twain—
A cold and clownish herdsman, of scant speech,
That had his dwelling 'midst the Apennine,—
Who were my parents—what their lot of life—
Why they did quit me to the alien hand,
If they still lived? and twenty other questions,
That curious Nature prompted, to all which
Either he answer'd nothing, or with speech
Purposely from the purpose strove to turn
My thoughts to other things.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Did never word,
In some soft moment that the sternest have
When they feel happy, from his lips escape
Whence thou mightst guess their name? Bethink
thee, Gennaro!
Did he say nothing to thee?

GENNARO.

Nothing, lady,
Or what did 'mount to nothing; thus much only:
Being one day wearied with my urgency,
For so I did his patience importune
Even as the unjust judge—
He told me that my father died ere I
Could syllable his name, and my poor mother,
Girt with strong enemies that strove to quench
My infant and new-lighted spark of life
Gave me in charge to him. Their name, their country,
Condition, and strange accidents of life,
(For strange they must have been that did so chance,)
Of these he dropp'd no hint.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Why didst thou leave him?

GENNARO.

Because I did not love him, nor the life
I led with him.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

And whither went'st thou, then?

GENNARO.

To Venice, lady, where a scarr'd old sergeant,
That chanced to pass an hour in our cottage
Told me the state lack'd soldiers. He had fain

I took the Borgia's service, but such tales
Of the accurs'd Lucretia of that name
Had spread even to our solitude, that I
Had sooner enter'd Satan's.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

What a sting
His witless words ensheathe! Be not thus rash
Of speech, my Gennaro, for the world oft talks
Evil or good of those that merit neither
Being by their motives judged and not their actions;
And such may be the Borgia.

GENNARO.

Stain not thou
Thy beautiful and mercy-dropping lip
With speech of such as her; for her deeds pass
The measurement of man; and to embrace
The waist of her offences but belongs
To the Eternal span. But, of my mother—
Beseech thee, of my mother! Oh, couldst tell
How sweet, how precious, 'bove its fellow sounds,
Is every letter that doth spell that name,
Thou wouldst not grudge me all thou knowest of her—
I do entreat thee, tell me!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Thou almost
Persuad'st me to thy wish.

GENNARO.

Be quite a Christian,
Doing a Christian's deed; and if she live not
(As sure she cannot live so long away),
Thou, for thy tender tale, shall be to me
In my dead mother's place.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

How to decide?
That is the question in this strong dilemma.

GENNARO.

Why dost thou stand thus rapt?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Imperial fate!
The world's great axle, whereon all things wheel,
How dost thou turn all things to thy completing!
Come hither, Gennaro;
Bethink thee,—for the skies do often use
With our own vows to vex us, that so taught
We might to the Eternal leave to choose
His bounties and our own necessities—
Bethink thee,—should thy mother prove a thing
Most opposite what thou would'st have her be,
Bloody and lewd, that worshipp'd her own will,
And own'd no God beside; in all her ways,
And very elements that made her up,
So awful and so strange, earth did not hold,
Nor limning fancy feign her like in hell,

Or such was deem'd to be—which to all else
Save to ourselves, differs not from to be—
Could—could'st thou love her still?

GENNARO.

Thou dost but seek
To scare me with wild words; but Heaven to hear,
Be she to others what she will, to me
She shall be mother still!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

My mind's made up;
And come what may, I will this thing unfold—
Hist! one doth come this way!—
(*Putting on her mask.*)
So am I safe.

Enter MAFFIO, OLOFERNO, ASCANIO, *and* JEPPO, *preceded by Pages bearing torches.*

MAFFIO.

Halt with the lights there; noble Gennaro,
Know'st thou with whom thou talkest?

OLOFERNO.

Thou dream'st not
What baleful planet doth conceal its fires
Behind yon cloudy visor.

ASCANIO.

Oh, thou art snared,
And, by a luring Lamia 'trapp'd to love
One that 'longs not to earth.

JEPPO.

Behold the hand,
Foul screech o' the night, shall drag thee from thy bush
And blink thy sight with day!

GENNARO.

Jeppo, stand back!
As thou dost love thy life, I say, stand back!
Or, by the sword I carry, it shall need
More than the friendly privilege to lay hand
On yonder lady's brow! What, two years knight,
And know'st not that a woman's mask should be
Inviolate from the touch, and honourable
As a man's beard?

JEPPO.

So that she be a woman,
And not an unsex'd fiend.

GENNARO.

Madam, thou hear'st
The rascal terms they use; give me the 'vantage
Of thy fair name to tell them in their throats
How foully they do lie.

MAFFIO.

She doth not dare
With such a monstrous and world-startling word,
To split thy 'mazed ear.

GENNARO.

Beautiful statue,
Why dost thou stand thus mute? Oh, your rash words
Have numb'd her power of speech!

MAFFIO.

Is it even so?
Hath she no accents left to shape her name?
Then will I to her black and sinful soul
Strike with the sound of mine. Madam, look on me!
I am one Maffio Orsini, nephew
To noble Duke Gravina, whom thy ruffians
Stabb'd in his dead of sleep.

OLOFERNO.

Madam, look on me!
I am one Oloferno Vitellozzi,
Brother of Appiani; in whose cup,
At thine own festive but most fatal board
Thou didst put poisonous drugs, so more securely
To lay his coffers waste.

ASCANIO.

Madam, look on me!
I am one Ascanio Petrucci, son
Of old Petrucci, Signior of Sienna,
Whose grey and reverend head thou didst strike off
To seize on his broad lands.

JEPPO.

Madam, look on me!
My name is Jeppo Leveretti, cousin
To valiant Count Vitelli, whom thou hadst
Slain in a gaol at Rome.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

O God, O God!
Uproot the based hills and let the mountains
Fall on and cover me!

GENNARO.

My flow of blood
Turns to cold ice—my heart stands still and beats
not!

MAFFIO.

Unhappy Gennaro!—She with whom thou didst
Change vows of love and lock the mutual lip
Is a foul murderess!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Have mercy on me!

OLOFERNO.

A lewd incestuous hag with those that were
Next to herself in blood!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Pray you have mercy!

ASCANIO.

A godless wretch that hath no part in heaven
And scarce in very hell!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Kind Sir, be merciful!

MAFFIO.

Now, dost thou know her name? Then in one word——

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

(*Falling on her knees before* GENNARO, *and taking his hand.*)

Gennaro—sweet Gennaro! do not heed these men!
Some enemy hath set them on to this;
I did not do the things they charge me with!
Upon my soul, I did not! Oh, I'll swear——

MAFFIO.

Till thou art black with lies and still swear on,
Thou blushless piece of falsehood! Gennaro, 'tis
Lucretia Borgia——

GENNARO.

Wretch, let go mine hand!

(*He spurns her from him—the curtain falls.*)

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.

A Street in Ferrara; at the back of the stage is the Palace of the Duchess; over the entrance gate appears the word " BORGIA, *" engraved in conspicuous characters, and surmounted with the arms of that house.*

Enter from the Palace, LUCRETIA BORGIA.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

What doth it matter if the man that liv'd
A hundred years ago, liv'd out his time
Or had his thread cut short before 'twas spun?
Truly no more
Than it doth matter if the meal we ate
Three days ago was plentiful or lean;
For the past hath no value, or but moves
Our grief that it is gone, as odorous casks,
Being empty, make us envy they were full.
It is not murder, but the doing murder
That makes men toss o' nights. Who stabs a man

Sets up a picture that will not rub out,
While kings, that from the distance warrant death,
Not seeing death, know nothing of the pangs
Actual assassins suffer. What men call
Conscience, is corporal, dwelling in the eye;
Nor, greyhound-like, hath any faculty
To find the quarry that it cannot see.
I have writ many murders—look'd on none—
Being robuster of the soul than body;
So the poor spendthrift, with his pen, bids pay
A thousand ducats that being counted out
In his own presence, ducat after ducat,
He had not heart to part from; and so cheeks
Have blanch'd at coffins that could smile on death,
And thoughts of to be buried made to quake
A bosom that had flutter'd not to die.

(*Enter* GUBETTA.)

Hast all things ready for the feast to-night?

GUBETTA.

All's ready, madam.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

And our gentle guests—
The Signiors of Venice, they will come?

GUBETTA.

They had no choice but come, being in Ferrara,
And bidden of your Grace? Marry, they look'd
As though they would the honour had alit
On other heads than theirs.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Out on the hounds!
It is too merciful to let them make
Thus easily their exit out of life
Unplagued of years, and aches, and cankerous thoughts,
The envy, and the avarice, and the sharp
Sense of its own unloveliness that stings
Through the thick soul of age. Scourges and stakes
Hugg'd of the heretic, and racks that can
Add cubits to the stature, the base pangs
And reason-humbling agonies that wreak'd
On these immortal carcases of ours,
Shew all brutes like, the upright and the prone,
Had better taught the world that none might brave
The Borgia and live.

GUBETTA.

There spake my own,
My manly-hearted mistress, once again—
The Nemesis of the nations! Oh, great soul!
Being but thyself that mak'st all others thine—
Wouldst thou wert ever thus!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Sleep is Death's image—
Where then doth lie the sin to make it death,
And be the thing it seems? To-morrow is
Certified of to-day; then doth he see

To-morrow that hath seen the type of it;
And life is but a total of to-morrows.

GUBETTA.

It is the part of courage to ordain
Nothing but what itself would dare to do;
And he that puts a proper scorn on life,
In robbing others of the thing he scorns,
Doth only that which he had nothing reck'd
Had others done to him.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Why should we care
For honour and the blessing breath of man,
That such a paltry piece of being own
As reputation scarce hath time to unpack
But straight must budge again? If life were freehold,
Or held upon a thousand years of lease,
Or by some stipulate and fixed fine,
Ache of the flesh, or anguish of the soul,
Renewable for ever—then were Fame
Worthiest of all things, that not one poor plague
Of trouble or self-torture merits now.

GUBETTA.

To live in our soul's solitude, or bear,
When we do walk abroad, like provident snails,
Our houses on our backs,
And, like the prickly porcupine, turn out

Our bristles to the world—hath so much freedom
As man is heir to, by his base-craving body,
Doom'd to a vile dependence upon others!
Madam, what see'st thou that thou look'st so
strangely?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

That way doth lie the rack, else had I not
An atom of remorse.

GUBETTA.

She glares upon
The fancy-peopled ambient, and her lips
Stir with unspoken words!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

What will he think
Of this new deed of blood?

GUBETTA.

Alack—alack!
The fever works again, and Love, that oft
Begets it i'the hot and jealous breast,
Here doth abortion Death. I'll meddle not;
When the fit's at the worst the Leech stands by
And physic follows nature.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

It shall be so;
I'll see him once again, or ere they die.
Gubetta! get thee to him—thou know'st whom—
And bring him to our presence. I will walk

Hard by the river, where the alder-bushes
Dip their heads i' the stream, till the loud clock
Strikes the next knell of time. Do thou devise,
I may have speech of him.

GUBETTA.

I must obey you,
But with a heavy and reluctant heart.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

And as thou liv'st, Gubetta; as thou lov'st me—
As thou dost love thyself, I charge thee, see
He hath no harm to-night.

GUBETTA.

Content you, madam;
He shall be safe as though he were away;
And that is saying something for a guest
That banquets with the Borgia!

[*Exit* LUCRETIA BORGIA.

O woman, woman!
How art thou charg'd with a brief energy,
That, like the sudden cannon, in one blaze
Spends all it owns of strength! Couldst only hold
The topmost of thy pace through life's whole course,
Which of us might match with thee? But, the strength
Suiting not with the speed, first flagging comes,
Next weariness, and then the absolute pause;
And so the sturdy tortoise gains the goal,

While the hare slumbers at the distance-post.
Why do I love this woman—I, that love
No living thing beside? If 'tis long habit,
Or the imperial soul that dwelleth in her
Topping the manly gender as her own,
Or jealous Nature, envying that her sons,
Being impassible, should so be free,
I know not; but it is so—I do love her.
Well, for this boy whom she so dotes upon,
And I, for that he is the pitiful crack
In what were else unfissur'd adamant,
Would willingly stab; whither to light upon him?
His hostelrie, I think, is i' the High Street,
Hard by the market-place. So, here he comes,
Mix'd with his brother Swisses, that sell blood
As chemists distillations of rare herbs,
For so much gold the drop; of their own veins
Making vile revenues, and abhorr'd estates!

(*Enter* GENNARO, MAFFIO, OLOFERNO, ASCANIO, *and* JEPPO.)

Give ye good day, fair Signiors of Venice!
How doth Ferrara like the noble Jeppo?

JEPPO.

Passably well—which is to say, not much;
At least, I do not not think I like it much.
Eh, Oloferno, dost thou like it much?

OLOFERNO.

I think of other things. De Belverana,

Whom we have ever look'd on as a friend—
Ate with thee, drank with thee, to thine eye held up
As to the silver'd mirror, our clear thoughts
In unpick'd honest conversation drest—
(What things 'mong bloody and remorseless Turks,
As for a shield to trusted lives have been)—
I charge thee, answer me—Doth any ill
Forbode us of thy knowledge from this feast
Her Grace hath bade us to?

GUBETTA.

On my life, none!—
Upon mine honour, none! but favour only
And fair forgetfulness of injuries past,
All, like the warlike hatchet, buried here!

ASCANIO.

Would we dared trust thee, Spaniard?

GUBETTA.

If suspicion
Still stirs one muddy thought within your breasts,
That clear as glass might be and yet not break,
Then trust me not at all, Ascanio;
Trust only to yourselves, that as in proof,
With circumstance are arm'd.

MAFFIO.

What dost thou mean?
Thy words convey no image, or their sense
Needs holding to the fire!

GUBETTA.

Oh, how fear,
Like a foul traitor in the body's camp,
Against ourselves our captur'd wits doth turn,
Or spike them to no worth! What! are ye not
Stipendiaries of Venice, and as such,
Safer surrounded than with walls of brass?
Why we should have the Doge at our doors,
With twenty thousand followers at his back,
Knocking to know if ye were hurt or not,
Dar'd we do mischief to ye.

OLOFERNO.

That rings well!

GUBETTA.

Nor shall test ill, Lieutenant. Come, I'll shew ye
That ye have naught to fear! Sirs, listen to me;
Her highness, thinking o'er the terms on which
Ye lately parted from her, doth prefer
That your first entertainment in Ferrara
Be at the Palace of Princess Negroni—
The beautiful Neapolitan will be
Your hostess, not herself.

MAFFIO.

Now do I breathe!

GUBETTA.

Breathe freely, noble Maffio. Oh, dear friends,
Here in Ferrara, they that have the grace

To gaze an instant on divine Negroni
Deem themselves happy, though they die the next!

ASCANIO.

And is she then so beautiful as Fame
Trumpets her to be?

GUBETTA.

She had pass'd the power
So had she flourish'd i' the back of time
For Tully to have told, Apelles drawn,
Or Phidias fashion'd in perennial stone!
But you will see her soon, and seeing, judge.

JEPPO.

I think thou art in love with her thyself!

GUBETTA.

I should be, could I be in love with any;
Even now she nearly makes me to forget
What I am 'trusted with to one of ye.
May it please the valiant Gennaro, her Grace
Would interchange some conversation with you?

GENNARO.

What doth she want with me? I will not go!
Tell her I will not go! and see you make not
The manner of it smoother than I say!

ASCANIO.

Bethink you where you are; 'twere best to go—

GENNARO.

I will not go, Ascanio—that's flat:
Better to die at once, than be the thing
That she would have me be! I'll not go near her!
Oh, Maffio, she could tempt a man to sin,
Though his good angel stood beside to guard him;
And when she speaks to me, though so few words,
There is a syren sweetness in her voice
Doth steal me from myself! I dare not go,
Come of it what there may.

MAFFIO.

I cannot blame,
But rather praise your mind.

GENNARO, (*turning to the palace.*)

O house of horror!
That of thy many chambers hast not one,
But what could such a tragic tale unfold,
So were it only gifted with a tongue,
Should make the insensate stones stand up and listen!
Thou fitting, for most foul, abode of her
That dost inhabit thee, how quickly would'st thou,
Having the sense of shame, throw down thy walls,
Dissolve thy pond'rous rafters into dust,
Make level with the earth thy springing towers,
Nor leave one stone to tell the traveller
That stood upon thy site, where thou hadst been!
What! dost thou stand and gaze upon me still,

Thou black and awful pile? Then come forth thou,
Indignant sword, and lop these shameless signs
That flout the public eye!

(*Draws his sword, and defaces the armorial bearings over the Palace Gate.*)

MAFFIO.

Gennaro, dear Gennaro!
Bethink thee where thou art, what thou dost do!

GENNARO.

I am much mov'd, my Maffio.

MAFFIO.

Pray you come,
Ere any see this deed!

GENNARO.

Leave me awhile—
I'll follow ye anon; beseech ye, leave me!

MAFFIO.

Tarry not long, beloved Gennaro!

GUBETTA, (*aside.*)

This to the Duke I'll send, that wrath may do
What love in her might tempt her to forego.

[*Exeunt all but* GENNARO.

GENNARO.

O Death! why fear we to pry into thine,
That seek to solve all other mysteries?
For say the body slept, and the quick soul,

Watching her time, went forth upon a quest
Of what was hidden from her human eye
And not return'd again? Hath death its life?
Then is to dream to die. Hath it no sense?
Then is it but to sleep, and that's not awful—
'Tis but a gloomy curtain, the great God,
Envying we should know all things, hath let fall
Betwixt his own hereafter and our here
That from the straining sight shuts out the scene
Until the great eternal act begins!
Well, I may peep behind it ere 'tis long,
And sooth to say, I do not care how soon!

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

The Gardens of the Borgia Palace; LUCRETIA BORGIA *discovered walking to and fro, attended by a Page—The clock strikes.*

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

He will not come to me that else had sav'd 'em;
So Fate, with vengeance, doth their doom complot;
And thus, before its half-way height was gain'd,
Sinks in a bloody sea my sun of mercy!
Search for Apostolo, and send him hither.

[*Exit Page.*

How are our deeds the offspring of events,
And not of our own selves! For who shall say,

I will do thus to-morrow, when to-day
Fills him with a new mind, and he that was
But yesterday so merciful as the lamb
Puts on the lion's mood! Oh, destiny!
More early than the heav'ns, whose awful shade
Obscures Omnipotence, and thy strong chain
Bindest the Everlasting, how often dost thou,
Mocking our coxcomb virtues, thrust us back
To the poor brutes we scorn, and fain would 'scape
from,
Makest parricides of heroes, the ignorant mother
Wed her own son, brothers to slay each other,
And things most Œdipæan and abhorr'd
Of our own wills and natures yet fall on us!

(*Enter* APOSTOLO.)

Go to the hostelrie of John Martuzzi;
There dwells a certain officer of Venice,
The Captain Gennaro. Watch well the door,
And when he enters, or doth quit the house,
Arrest and bring him hither.

APOSTOLO.

Dead or alive,
I'll bring him to your Grace!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

On your life, no!
Harm but one hair of his, and I will have thee
Hack'd in as many pieces as thou hast hairs!

Take such a force with thee, if he resist
Shall make resistance useless!

APOSTOLO.

Let your Grace
Rely on your poor servant, and an hour,
So that Ferrara holds, shall see him here!
[*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE III.

A Street in Ferrara; GENNARO'S *lodging in the back ground.*

Enter GENNARO.

GENNARO.

Tell me not he doth ill that lets out life,
Having an aching body or sick soul;
For if our pains are proofs and sorrows sent
Heaven-ward to turn our hearts, then medicine
And lenitive philosophy as much
Counteract Heaven's design as the bold knife,
That with a thrust, ends all the ills we are heirs to!
Either our bodies are our own or Heaven's:
Being ours, 'tis ours to use them as we will;
Being Heaven's, 'tis impious to interfere with
The griefs it hath pleas'd Providence visit on us!
Or, are we partly Heaven's, partly our own—

And thence the life-long wars we are the scenes of—
Now this way haling us, now haling that,
As heaven or earth pulls strongest? That seems
likely!
Well, I'll not plague myself to find what's truth,
But even live on, for that's least hazardous,
Nor dare to die without an invitation!

(*He goes into the house; as he closes the door, enter from opposite sides,* RUSTIGHELLO *and* APOSTOLO.)

RUSTIGHELLO.

Whom have we here? What, good Apostolo—
Worthy Apostolo! the honestest knife
In all Ferrara, give thee good day, good dagger!
Wilt tell me what dost here, Apostolo?

APOSTOLO.

With all my heart will I, that so I may
The better beg a favour at your hands.
Know, then, I've certain matters to dispatch
In this same street that do not want a witness.—
Ha, brother! dost thou take? Wilt be polite,
And give me up the street?

RUSTIGHELLO.

Too proud were I
To do so, were it compass'd by my power.
But, hark ye, in thine ear a word to speak,
I, too, have business here!

APOSTOLO.

The deuce you have!
And marry, Sir, with whom?

RUSTIGHELLO.

With one that now
Pass'd into yonder house!

APOSTOLO.

Why that's my man!

RUSTIGHELLO.

The devil it is! Why then I fear I must
On this occasion get you to give place.
My orders are to seize the Signior,
And bring him to the Palace.

APOSTOLO.

So are mine.

RUSTIGHELLO.

Oh, then I see the Duke hath sent you here
To give me your assistance in this matter.
Well, I had been enough; yet am I happy
In your companionship.

APOSTOLO.

The Duke, dost say?
Why 'twas the Duchess that dispatch'd me here!

RUSTIGHELLO.

Then plague on Duke and Duchess both, say I,
For puzzling two poor fellows in such wise:

What's to be done? The man is but a man;
Can't go to both; be hugg'd and hang'd at once;
Beheaded and belov'd at the same time;
How dost advise to act?

APOSTOLO.

Heav'n only knows!

RUSTIGHELLO.

Hark ye, I'll spin a ducat i' the air,
And let the winner win the Signior!

APOSTOLO.

'Tis a mad fancy.

RUSTIGHELLO.

Shall it be a bargain?

APOSTOLO.

There is no other remedy.

RUSTIGHELLO.

Here goes then!

APOSTOLO.

Tails!

RUSTIGHELLO.

And 'tis heads!

APOSTOLO.

With heads the Duke hath won!

RUSTIGHELLO.

And his own head the gentleman hath lost!

APOSTOLO.

Well, 'tis the same to me—adieu, good brother.

RUSTIGHELLO.

Brother, adieu; and better luck next time.

[*Exit* APOSTOLO; RUSTIGHELLO *enters the house; the scene closes.*

SCENE IV.

A Hall in the Duke's Palace; the Duke discovered sitting at a table; at the back of the stage hangs a curtain, in front of which are ranged the Duke's guards.

DUKE.

Here am I Duke; then why not of myself—
That smaller state to rule? If I were Duke
So of my passions as of my domains,
Then had I with a strong and breasting bank
From out my tranquil and clear pool of life
This muddy-rushing current of revenge
Damm'd and kept wholly shut: sleep doth it spoil,
Mars appetite, puts gall into my drink,
And every natural function of the frame
Upsets, and robs of its accustom'd use.
The woman is a wanton—so are most

That live in Palaces, and have their bloods
Hot with high feeding, nor with labour lower'd,
Nor censure of the sharp-mouth'd commons dread
Perch'd on their top of power; for vice in kings—
Respect being had to their great faculties—
More their misfortune is than 'tis their fault;
Where much is given, much will be required;
Where much is tempted, much must be excused;
And that's fair play to both.
Were she another's wife, and not my own,
Then had I bade him whistle her down the wind,
And with the strumming end of an old song
To solder up his sore. Then why not now,
Being mine own, and worthless, and more pay
Than persecute the man that takes her from me?
Alack, alack!
We keep our reason for our neighbour's ills,
Our feelings for our own; the which to heal
Philosophy and fine religion,
Have so much worth,
Even as a sun-dial stuck upon a grave
Telling Death the time o' day!

(*Enter* RUSTIGHELLO.)

RUSTIGHELLO.

So please your Grace, the Signior is arrest.

DUKE.

Then is it time that I made up my mind
And that's not long to do.—

Go to my chamber, and unlock the cupboard
Next to the casement, that which hath
The clubbed son of Jupiter carv'd upon it;
There, on a silver salver, you shall find
A golden flagon, with a cup beside it;
Set them in yonder cabinet,—and look ye,
Mine honest Rustighello, that no drop
Cross your lips by the way, or it may chance
Be the last flagon thou shalt ever quaff from,—
'Tis the avenging wine of Borgia
That spares the use of swords.

RUSTIGHELLO.

Gramercy, Sir!
I thank you for the hint.

DUKE.

Yet, stay, good fellow,
The man may not be thirsty; and though one
Can lead him to the water, 'tis not twenty
Shall make the horse to drink. If I shall say
Simply your name, then bring the flagon hither;
If I strike on the bell, have thou thy weapon
Ready for use; it may be that the patient
Shall need to lose some blood.

[*Exit* RUSTIGHELLO.

Hang him, poor goat!
How small is his offence compar'd with hers
That tempted him to offend; yet must he pay for't
Even as our first father did, that lack'd,

Like him, the grace to say a woman—no,
Or we shall have successors to our sway
Sprung from all bloods but ours.

(*Enter Page, with a letter.*)

What have we here?

(*Reads.*)

"One that doth serve the Duchess, yet well loves
"the Duke, doth in this way make known to him
"that a certain officer of the Venetian, Gennaro by
"name, hath, in the open day, villanously hacked and
"disfigured the bearings of the Borgia, which deed too
"fearlessly hath been perpetrated, now fearfully to be
"denied."

Now doth this pass all bounds! Her very minion,
The sweating slaving layer of her lust,
To mock her i' the eye and flare of day,
That his lewd comrades, nay, the total city
May see the hold he hath upon her mood!
I shall go mad to think on 't; or, it may be
Iræ amantium, quoth the Accidence,
A passing pet, redintegrating love,
Scratches of cats, that love and caterwaul,
And still love on. Oh, damn them, damn them both!
Well, well!—
'Tis but another honeing of the knife
Was edg'd enough already——

(*Enter Page.*)

PAGE.

May it please your Grace,
The Duchess doth demand an audience.

DUKE.

Doth she, good boy? Then shall the Duchess have one:
Give her attendance, sirs!

[*Exeunt Guards.*

Now should I be
Lash'd to the vessel like the cunning Greek,
And with the dull impermeable wax
Seal up mine ear against the Syren's song;
Yea, like the bandag'd justice should I be,
And have no eyes to gaze on that fair face!
Oh, Providence! that in the serpent's tail
Hast a loud 'larum plac'd, why mad'st thou not
These serpents that we wed, of outward shape,
As of their inward and invisible souls,
Loathely and monstrous be? So had they been
Virtuous in their own spite, and hornless we!

(*Enter* LUCRETIA BORGIA, *attended.*)

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

My Lord, the Duke,
I come an instant suitor to your Grace;
An injur'd and an instant suitor, come I.

DUKE.

So fair a suitor cannot ask, but have.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

In few words, good my Lord, for I were loth
To hold you long with what relates to me,
The blazonry of Borgia o'er my doors,
The noble royal ensigns of the house
To which the Duke Alphonso owes so much,
Hack'd by some unknown hand have droop'd their heads
To the dishonouring dust, foul scorn to me,
And theme for vulgar wonder, or vile jest,
To each lewd passer-by. My Lord, I come not
To weary you with talking of the tie
That knits us twain together, nor have liv'd
The life to give a warrant to my words
Spake I on such a subject, but I'd have you
Bethink yourself, for your sake as for mine;
I am your wife, upon whose head can light
No cloud of contumely, but with its shade
Presently wraps your own. Oh, my good Lord,
You once did love my person, is it much
Thou shouldst mine honour love? Wert jealous once
Of my affection, why not of my fame?
Didst ever praise me, that with rigid hand
I curb'd the rascal and rude commonalty
Of mine own States? would'st wish me to become
The unavenging and poor stingless scoff
Of your base Ferrarese? I have said my say;
If it shall please you pass this insult o'er,

Henceforth I'll hold myself absolv'd to seek
Redress at other hands. Great Cæsar Borgia,
The dreadful Duke, that makes the world grow white
With mention of his name, my famous brother,
Doth with a puissant force at Forli lie;
Unto his camp will I betake myself,
And of a brother seek the sympathy
A husband lacks to yield.

DUKE, (*aside.*)

She doth not know
Who 'tis hath spoil'd her scutcheon.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Will it please
Your Grace to answer me?

DUKE, (*aside.*)

Ha! I spy light
From out her darkness—

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Fare you well, my lord!

DUKE.

Go not, go not, beseech you, noble Duchess!
Madam, of this offence done 'gainst us both—
For so thou truly say'st—outstripping Fame,
That ever leaves the speediest scout behind,
Hither had brought the tidings ere you came,
Whereat much mov'd, no instant did I pause,
But straight the offender seiz'd.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Can this be true?
Hath your grace acted thus? Oh, then, be sure
That hast thou done that best became thee do!
My Lord, I humbly thank you; and, for that
I did eclipse your honour with base doubts,
Having no root in truth, I crave your pardon.
Will it please you bid the prisoner be brought forth?

DUKE.

Bring forth the prisoner!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Ha! what means that?
Thy lip is curl'd with triumph, and thine eye
Glares with a bitter mirth! Turn not away!
Let me look in your face, my Lord Alphonso!
By Heav'n! there is a mischieful meaning there
Not natural to it, that I cannot fathom!
Sir Duke, I beg a boon!

DUKE.

So be it not
Boon of his life,—'tis granted ere express'd.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

'Tis not for such that I am wont to sue:
Wilt swear to me that who hath done this deed
Leaves not this roof alive?

DUKE.

With all my heart,
With all my soul, with all my body's strength,

And Heav'n so help me, as my vow I keep!
I trust your Highness is contented now.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

I'm satisfied; set forth the prisoner!
What have I done to these base Ferrarese
That they should flout me thus? Having none before,
Henceforward shall they have good cause of hate—
Set forth the prisoner! I would look upon him.

(*The curtain, at the back of the stage, is drawn aside, and* GENNARO *discovered a prisoner.*)

What doth this mean? Oh, my foreboding heart!
It cannot be; he hath no part in this,
Yet, wherefore stands he here a prisoner?

DUKE.

Your Highness seems much mov'd.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

My Lord, my Lord!
Here is some strange mistake or scurvy jest;
This is no Ferrarese, but one of Venice,
And cannot have a cause to offend 'gainst me.

DUKE.

The worse offender he, to offend without one;
But let us leisurely advance in this,
And that do justly that we do at all:
Signior of Venice, know'st thou, or canst gues
Whereof thou stand'st accus'd?

GENNARO.

My Lord, I know it.

DUKE.

Then know, that by a fierce and bloody oath
This noble Duchess hath impos'd upon us,
We are unalterably sworn to slay
Him whom his own admission or our proof
Shall of this act avouch. Being thus forewarn'd
What say'st thou to the charge?

GENNARO.

Nothing, my Lord,

DUKE.

Nothing, young Signior? he that nothing pleads,
Being of a crime arraign'd, doth guilty plead.
I ask thee plainly, boy, was thine the hand
That hack'd the arms of princely Borgia?

GENNARO.

It boots not to deny what you can prove.

DUKE.

Your Highness hears his answer.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

What strong madness
Hath urg'd him on to this? It cannot be
But he was dar'd to do it, or knew not
Whose were the emblems that his hand defac'd!
My Lord, I would a word with you; I have thought
Over this thing again, and not desire
This youth should for his folly pay with death!

DUKE.

How, Madam, should not die? You fill me with
Amazement for your words! What can have caus'd
The wind of your opinion so to shift?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

That which should all opinion make to shift—
Subsiding anger, and the second thought.
Crime hath no common magnitude; nor he
That robs an orchard, suffers the same law
With him that robs a church. Draco being dead,
The injury determines the offence;
And mine lies only in the thoughts of men
Whose mouths he were no Prince that could not shut!
Feeling no injury, none have I sustain'd:
Pray you to let him go!

DUKE.

Your Grace forgets
The oath you forc'd me take!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Oaths, oaths, my Lord!
Talk not to me of oaths, my Lord Alphonso!
He that hath made a thing can break a thing
Or we but our own slaves! 'Tis only heathen
Worship the idols that themselves have hew'd.
Hath an oath ears to hear with? eyes to see?
Hands hath it to avenge? Go to, go to;

You have broke many an oath for shedding blood;
Break one to save it now!

DUKE.

I cannot play
Longer the hypocrite, but must have vent,
Or I shall choke with rage! Strumpet! tis for
Thy minion that thou su'st!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Minion! O Heav'n!
My Lord, by all that's holiest, all that's most
Of God, and man rever'd, I'll swear to thee
This youth doth in my heart no portion hold
Thyself shouldst grudge to give!

DUKE.

I shall go mad
That thou shouldst be so bold! I tell thee, whore,
Not all thy house, thy bloody house in arms,
And thund'ring at the gate, his life should save,
Though mine own breath ebb'd with the flow of his!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

His life! O God, his life!

DUKE.

Have I, then, touch'd thee,
Thou harden'd heart of brass? and thou art shewn
To be but only flesh! Flow on, flow on,
Spite of her eyes, ye tears; for banish'd nature,
By flippant gay prosperity expell'd,

To her confiscated and old abode
In our dark hour returns. Now am I happy
As thou hadst ne'er been false.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

One way is left me:
He is by temperament such as rather would
Do a great crime than suffer a small scandal.

DUKE.

What art thou muttering?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

That I'll loudly say.
My Lord, it pleas'd you swear a while ago—
And since thou art thus reverent grown of oaths
I'll claim thine oath's observance—thou would'st grant me,
Only his life reserv'd, what boon I ask'd.

DUKE.

This is some new device!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

If he must die,
As die thou say'st he shall—for both our sakes,
Your own, my Lord, as mine, I would not have him
So die, the scandalous and obscene crowd,
Ever to prate against their betters prone,
Were witness to his end. Justice demands
(And surely less than justice, flagrant wrong)
No spectacle but death.

DUKE.

There's grace in this,
All graceless though thou art that utterest it;
Madam, so that he die, and that outright,
Thyself the manner of his death may'st choose.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Be it by poison, then!

DUKE.

By poison be it;
What, ho, there! Rustighello—I say, Rustighello!

(*Enter* RUSTIGHELLO, *bearing a flagon.*)

Signior of Venice, for the open shame
To this most virtuous lady thou hast done,
An open, shameful, and long-stretching death
Suitablest shouldst thou die: yet our kind Duchess,
Out of her Christian charity, or it may be
From some more cover'd cause we know not of,
But which thyself may'st peradventure guess,
From such hath rescued thee; wherefore, from out this cup
Drink thou her health and thine own punishment.

GENNARO.

How, if of such a cup I will not drink?

DUKE.

Why, then, we'll have thee drench'd as horses are!

GENNARO.

It shall not need the horn, most princely groom!
Give me the cup. Farewell, all human things,
And some I lov'd as well that were not human,
Poor fondling brutes, that make a God of man,
As savages of some great voyager.
I part in peace from all things, harbouring no rest
Of enmity 'gainst any: time has been
I was in love with life, and the rich future
From out her prodigal and motherly lap
For each new day purvey'd its proper pleasure;
All days were holidays then—school-time was none;
Passion and power went hand in hand with me,
And every object had its energy:
All's dead within me now, ere I am dead
To that which is without me. Give me the cup?
(*Takes the cup.*)
Potentest democrat! one sup of thee
Makes gods of ragged ones, and him that wrapp'd
His trunk in kingly purple and fine linen
Turns to a howling fiend! Here's of the juice
That gives no after-ache.

DUKE.

Nor present pain,
Save for the point of time; be that thy comfort.
Madam, there's more of this whence this did come
For thy next paramour!

[*Exeunt all but* GENNARO *and* LUCRETIA BORGIA.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Fool—shallow fool!
Vindictive shallow fool! that with her own
Weapon didst think to beat the Borgia;
Thou knowest to ill-do, good husband mine,
Not the undoing ill. Fear nothing, boy!

GENNARO.

I do not, being past fear.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Then hope something.

GENNARO.

What is there left to hope when death is certain?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

I tell thee, Gennaro, there hath cross'd thy lip
Nothing shall rob thy life.

GENNARO.

And I reply
Welcome to die as live; both are indifferent.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Whence hath this stupor seiz'd thee, and profound
Disrelish of the thing that men most prize?

GENNARO.

I cannot answer thee; it may be spleen
That plays strange tricks with us; or the reckless mood
That oft doth overcome our sky of life,
Blotting its blue with gloom, earth's great ones vexing

To think upon the toys they have cut throats for;
Or, as I partly deem, thyself hast caus'd
This chill of blood, that didst so overheat it
With thought of things impossible.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

How his soul,
Even on the suppos'd shore and brink of death,
Anchors to that one thought! Drink of this phial,
And nothing shall escape thee that I know—
Drink, I implore, and quickly!

GENNARO.

She that hath reft
So many lives would fain, for change, restore one;
Why should I baulk her humour, being merciful?
There, I have drank thy juice.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

So art thou sav'd.

GENNARO.

And thou, for aught that thou knowest, doubly damn'd;
For on thy head I do devolve the sins
Of this new life, which is new scope for sin,
Thou hast breath'd into me, no wish of mine,
With thine confederating.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

With years of fire
Additional to mine own, I'll answer them!

Oh, thou great Concave! if a wretch like I
Dar'd mock thine azure and approachless vault,
That, with compassionate and gentle scorn,
Look'st on this roar of earth, for this day's deed
I had, with oiled joints, thus humbly thank'd thee.

GENNARO.

The devil prays; henceforth let good men curse!
Madam, farewell! When I have stouter spirits,
And a less perturb'd body, I will claim
What yet I nothing trust, the tale thou ow'st me.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Farewell, fair boy! it shall be thine for asking.

[*Exeunt severally.*

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I.

A Street in Ferrara.—Enter GUBETTA.

GUBETTA.

Give me brief breathing time, and unvex'd ears,
For I am flagg'd with folly! Gods, that men
Having the choice of silence, should so talk,
And they within an hour of their dumb graves!
Henceforth I'll set it down, he that bears arms
Hath but three topics—women, wine, and horses,
Whereof, like ceaseless squirrels in a cage,
They ever go the round, but get no further!
Or is it but of universal man
The course and downward tendency? For we
Live late in time and banquet but on crumbs.
They that came first and gather'd in the crop,
Perplex'd with many riches, left large gleanings
Which fell to the second age, to us bequeathing
A few stray straws to pick, and think them
treasures.

In the world's decadence gold turns to silver,
And silver ends in iron; which being ended,
Death shall fuse all things, and new earths be coin'd,
That Heav'n may have new playthings: yet doth man
Think mightily of himself, and lift his horn,
That not so much excels the elephant,
Remembering brute, that not forgets a wrong,
Or despis'd pig, most sociable of beasts,
That never passes you without a grunt;
Or sparrows, that live longer in a May
Than we do in a century of time—
As they the moth, or giddy-pated fly!
For which being tried by reason, hath most reason—
The bee that hives for winter, or the clown
That drinks each doit he earns? Yet, both being dead,
But one shall wake again! Oh, mystery!
Oh, modesty of man! Well, there's time left
To suffer, and make suffer in our turn,
And that's the thing in hand!

(*Enter* ASCANIO, OLOFERNO, MAFFIO, *and* JEPPO.)

Your pardon, Signiors!
A sudden errand I had left undone
Call'd me away from ye; the which dispatch'd,
I am once more to dispose. How will it please ye
To spend the space 'twixt this and supper time?

JEPPO.

In thinking of our suppers ere they come,
And so enjoy them twice.

ASCANIO.

If any man
Wish'd to obtain a favour at my hands,
I'd have him come to me when I am full;
For lacking food, I'm fretful, and a straw
Would split with my best friend.

OLOFERNO.

The crabbed Roman,
That in the stomach plac'd the seat of sense,
Had sense and stomach both.

GUBETTA.

Let lean divines,
And sour-ey'd moralists say what they will,
The constantest of pleasures is the best,
And what is constanter than appetite?
Music demands an ear; love lasts a month,
And then we loathe the thing that most we lov'd;
Perfumes soon pall; authority makes bend
The knees of men, but cannot bow their hearts;
Good-doing oftenest is ill-return'd,
And gratitude acesces into hate;
But honest appetite, being fill'd to-day,
Nothing the less enjoys its meal to-morrow.

JEPPO.

I'm cheerful, and look forward with delight

To look on our fair hostess; pray, she use
A cunning cellarer, and have aged flasks.

ASCANIO.

There'll be wild work among the corks to-night!
Sight-seeing's thirsty, and the liberate juice
Of the long-prison'd Bacchus, down dry throats
Leaps lovingly, like fishes into nets!

OLOFERNO.

How once we fear'd the feast that now we wish!

GUBETTA.

Thus ever is it with the things we fear—
Only the ills of flesh are solid ills;
Terrors that shake the soul but bullies are,
That being look'd into with resolute eyes
Straight drop their own, and vanish from our presence.
Clouds, seen on distant hills, have pass'd for giants,
And roads that mountains look to eyes remote,
Lack little to be level when we tread them.

MAFFIO.

Pray that our fears be only of our fancies!
Come, Sirs, let's cast these habits that we wear,
And fitly fashion us for a lady's banquet!

[*Exeunt all but* GUBETTA.

GUBETTA.

O Faith, exhaustless Faith! why are there not
More prophets in the world that might use up

The good belief that wastes for want of 'em?
I had turn'd Mahomet and lying heavens
Transmuted to true sceptres, had I known
Man's mine of faith before, how deep to dig,
How ready to renew! Well, God be with 'em;
He's wisest that drinks pleasure from most founts.
The heathen, that a hundred altars rear'd,
Peopling the groves with gods, the bosky dells
With hopping satyrs, rivers with clear nymphs,
And the great Ternal elements assign'd
Each to its own supreme Saturnides,
He in his young and nature-founded faith,
Made week-days Sabbaths, and the world a church,
And so was happiest! 'Tis a while ago
That one did speak so reverently of thee,
Old Optimus Maximus; so have a care
Of thy one worshipper, and be grateful to him.
[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

A Chamber in the Borgia Palace.—Enter LUCRETIA BORGIA.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Time's left to save them yet—yet wherefore save them?
'Tis justice, not revenge, doth bid them die!

For where the dull and unimaginative law
Stops short and takes no heed of injuries,
Revenge steps in and takes the place of justice;
Else how were honour being of the mind—
Not corporal as the law's gross objects are—
Kept on her throne 'mong men? Do as thou art,
Not as thou wouldst be done by, saith the world,
And being of the world, who scorns the world,
Such were best out of it. Or to forgive 'em,
And so be scoff'd again?—for life's a boon,
Lacks opportunity to be repaid,
And gratitude, inanimate of hope,
Turns to the jealous spleen! O gracious One!
Hearer of all to whom all other ears
Save only thine are shut—sweet Lord, vouchsafe me
That I may know thy will—one little sign,
A little outward sign, as erst thou didst
In the old days miraculous, nor in times
Later than they were, wholly hast withheld
From great importunate spirits that have sought Thee,
With scourgings, and with fastings, and with tears
And life-long supplications, till their knees
Grew horny with much praying;—so will I live
Henceforth as saints have liv'd; wash from my hands
The branded blackness out, and for a robe
Of new-donn'd innocence and fresh-born faith,

Fling the old slough of sin ; even as the man
That had his hands carnation'd with the blood
Of his poor servant, slain for a fair wife,
Did, out of God's great mercy, grow to be
Most after His own heart! There is no sign!
Then am I damn'd already, and as well
Slay the sheep as the lamb, for the crime's one,
And one the punishment!

Enter GUBETTA.

GUBETTA.

Doth your mind hold?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Have I not injur'd been, and live not they
That wreak'd the injury?

GUBETTA.

All perish, then?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

All have alike offended: let all pay
The penalty alike.

GUBETTA.

So were it justest;
For, of the equal actors in a crime,
Mercy to some were murder to the rest;
And wisest were it so; for any sav'd
Begets the hope of safety in all others:
Repeal, but not relax a law being made;
Beggars and pilferers pass by shut doors
But knock at those ajar.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

It is the blessing
Of the bold age we live in armed power
Works her own will, and Nature dares be seen.
Cow'd by civilization the poor soul
Shrinks in her cell, nor lets her horns emerge.
Laws make but hypocrites, not honest men;
And bloodless hands beget worse-hating hearts.
Oh, if the spirit of the bolder brute
Glow'd in the breast of man, how worthless were
The rods with which we rule our equal clay!
The valiant tiger, looking from his lair
Upon his brindled brother, done to death,
Nothing the more himself abstains from blood,
Whilst man, best tutor'd by another's stripes,
Reads a whole decalogue in the whipping-post
And grows from gibbets good! Now let us part—

GUBETTA.

Each to our several ends——

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

As they to theirs.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

A Street in Ferrara.—Enter the DUKE.

DUKE.

'Tis said that lamps
Have liv'd in darkness for a thousand years
And died to see the day; so are our passions
Quench'd in their own success. Disgust is still
The shadow of delight and ecstasy,
Whose moment of fruition could we fix,
Earth were a match for Heav'n, expires not only,
But leaves a base unhandsome corpse behind.
Hope flies satiety that waits on want
And to anticipate, excels to have.
Poor goat! I think I could forgive thee now,
Wert thou alive again, whom, whilst thou liv'dst,
No dearer object had I than to slay.

Enter RUSTIGHELLO.

RUSTIGHELLO.

My Lord, my Lord! the young Venetian——

DUKE.

Let the dead sleep in peace, nor with their thoughts
Vex those that still can feel; his life hath paid
The damage of his crime.

RUSTIGHELLO.

My Lord, he lives;
As little like to die as you and I:

Time hath not mark'd a notch upon his score
Since I beheld him!

DUKE.

Sirrah, thy day's service
Outweighs thy night's offence, or, by St. George,
I'd have thee scourg'd into thy sober self!
Hence, fellow—hence! nor let me see thy face
Until thy wine-turn'd wits are straight again!
Get thee to bed, I say!

RUSTIGHELLO.

Pray you forgive me
That dare to say I am not mad nor drunk,
But wonder-stricken only. Good my lord!
Were it the latest word I had to say,
Still would I say, the young Venetian Signior
Hath come to life again, or never died—
I know not which, but one!

DUKE.

His pulse doth beat
As steadfast as my own, and on his cheek
No hot and shining fever hath its seat.
What ravell'd knot is here? Can it be true
The rascal minion lives? Is poison water?
Or breathe there those on earth that will not die
Until their brains are clean and quite knock'd out?
Good fellow, think for me, and find a key
For this perplexity, for my wits wheel,
And shape no forward course!

RUSTIGHELLO.

I have read in books
That the old Pontic King, great Mithridate,
Against the quick and gnawing poison's tooth
A forefenc'd stomach had——

DUKE.

Forefenc'd!—O fool!
O idiot! O incomparable fool!
That stay'd not by and saw the minion die!
By Heav'n, I see it all—I see it now!
She hath some herb, or drug, or potent stone,
Ruby, or bezoar, or the mummy's juice,
Or masterful liquor of the molten gold,
(Ablest alexipharmics from the page
Of Avicen and old Nicander cull'd,)
That like a fresh and charging enemy
Hath check'd the conquering venom in its course,
And pluck'd its half-won palm! O fool—fool!
Out with thy dagger, fellow! O my hate
Renews with his new life; let's see if steel
Hath any antidote or juggling spells
Can blunt the poniard's point; follow me, sirrah!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.

A splendid Banqueting Room; GUBETTA, MAFFIO, ASCANIO, OLOFERNO, *and* JEPPO *discovered sitting round a table. At the back of the stage are large folding-doors.*

GUBETTA.

These are the only hours we should call life;
The rest are but existence, which we share
With brutes, and reptiles, and sap-streaming trees.
Ho, there! fill round, fill high, till the bright foam
O'ertops the envying brim.

OLOFERNO.

Eternal wine!
That erst in old Olympus crown'd the cups
That fed the ichor of immortal veins
Till every god was Jove, and Jove forgot
That he was more than they. Thrice-blessed juice!
What do we lack of Heaven that lack not thee?

ASCANIO.

Thou wert the tree of knowledge, mystic vine;
The tree, at once, of knowledge and delight
Wert thou! Thou dost new-string the untun'd frame,
The flagging pulse re-kindle, and each vein
Fill with a rushing stream of strength and joy.

OLOFERNO.

The inmost heart, the esoteric soul,
The flashing particle, the divine spark,
The piece and glowing fragment of the God
That lives within us,—'tis thou callest forth
And shew'st us our own souls!

JEPPO.

I cannot say
Fine things in praise of wine, but I can drink it
With any man that lives.

GUBETTA.

Why, this is friendly;
This manful is and wise, which are one thing
In more things than they differ, so to scorn
The mawkins and the straw-stuff'd men of fear,
And live while ye have life! What ho, there, knaves!
Fill round—fill round, I say! Why doth a cloud
Hang on my Maffio's brow, and the full cup
That with a loving kiss thy lips should greet,
Clings to the drouthy board?

MAFFIO.

Pray you excuse me;
I have a peevish stomach that will not
Tolerate trifling with it. Did no morrow
Tread on the heels of night, I had done reason
To old Silenus' self.

GUBETTA.

The night must come
That shall not have a morrow; nor can any
Be sure of longer time that serves to name it.
A hundred years slew Xerxes and his army
And half as many minutes may slay us.

ASCANIO.

These are the saws of schools, and windy words
That fill the mouths of boys. What inference build you
On such a base of breath?

GUBETTA.

Marry, even that,
That for a thousand of its bravest years
Fill'd the old world before us. Life and death
Only are certain; wherefore enjoy the one
Before the other puts an end to it.
The present is time's clearing, whence we gaze
Round on the gloomy forests that enclose us;
A little rock it is, that for awhile
Uplifts its head from out the flat of waters
Till the next spring-tide comes, and covers it;
And then all things are sea.

MAFFIO.

That were to live
As there had been no past and was no future.

GUBETTA.

The past is witness'd by its own remains,

As bones betoken that there once was flesh;
The future hath no warranty, nor we
Warranty to partake it if it had:
What share of it shall fall to any here,
Fate wills, God knows, and time may shortly
shew us!
But these are dry-lipp'd topics, and demand
To rinse the dust they raise. Signiors, a toast!
Which even you, my Maffio, must not shrink from.
Boy, broach another flagon, and our cups
Fill with the Chian wine that Greek Metaxa
Presented to the City. Sirs, I give ye,
The giver of the feast, our gracious hostess!

(*A Page fills their cups from a different vessel of wine; all rise and drink, except* GUBETTA, *who only raises the cup to his lips.*)

ALL.

Our hostess, our fair hostess!—to the health
Of our kind hostess!

(*While they are still standing, the doors at the back of the stage fly open, and* LUCRETIA BORGIA *is discovered gazing on them; behind her are ranged her Guards.*)

GUBETTA, (*pointing to the Duchess.*)

Lo, your hostess thanks you!
She that hath feasted you returns you thanks—
The Duchess of Ferrara gives you thanks!

How, Signiors! not a word to welcome her,
That had so many lately, and such loud ones?
Alack, poor fools, ye shall be dumber shortly!

JEPPO.

What doth he mean?

ASCANIO.

Some monstrous mystery
Wraps itself in his words.

OLOFERNO.

My mind misgives me,
And horror-gend'ring fancies in my heart,
Like startled snakes of grim Tisiphone,
Erect their hissing heads.

MAFFIO.

Madam, will it please you
To let us know the worst? for in suspense
Lie many fears of death. We have drank our doom
From yonder venom'd cups?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Fear is a prophet,
And one that doth not deal in parables.
Signior, thou hast guess'd rightly, and now standest
Upon the icy margin of the stream
Wherein we all must plunge, some day or other.
What doth it matter when?

OLOFERNO.

O fools, to fall
Into the very trap we so suspected!

ASCANIO.

Such thoughts are useless now; we are in the maw
That never dropp'd its prey because it shriek'd,
But only closer crunch'd it.

JEPPO.

Mayest thou receive
Our souls, Almighty One; and grant that their
Abrupt and sudden severance from the flesh
May, in some sort, excuse the shape they come in!

(*The Guards lead out* ASCANIO, OLOFERNO, *and* JEPPO; GUBETTA *follows them; as they approach* MAFFIO, *he retires to the back of the stage, and falls.*)

MAFFIO.

Let me die here; I have no limbs to move with.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Here, or elsewhere, so only that thou diest!

MAFFIO.

Oh, murderous-minded woman! Oh, most fell
And cruel of God's creatures!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Call me not cruel,
For cruelty delights to see men suffer,
And I no pleasure have that ye should die;

But I am Borgia, and it might not be
That Borgia should be wrong'd and not resent it.

MAFFIO.

Sweet Heaven, have mercy on me!

LUCRETIA BORGIA, (*after looking steadfastly on his body.*)

In how deep
A well of mystery dost thou lie, oh, Death!
Of whom we cannot answer, if thou art
Our end or our beginning! Being our end
We are not worth to think of,—but mere flesh
Differing from other flesh only in this,
That we are doom'd to a worse sepulchre.
The flesh of beasts becomes the food of man,
The flesh of man becomes the food of worms,
And which the nobler is needs no deciding.
Or art thou but a dark and earthy tunnel
Leading to light beyond? Then to the light
Of what life dost thou lead? Not life eternal,—
For that which hath one end must needs have two;
The infinite is not father'd of the finite.
Can it be, things have souls that have not reason?
But reason hath its lodging in the brain,
For when the brain is injur'd so is reason,
And man, that hath not reason, is more bestial
Than the half-reasoning beast, that hath no soul
Allow'd of our cold creed. Who shall affirm,
O wise old Samian, thou wert in the wrong

That taught that life was but the source of life,
Better or worse, even as the former earn'd it?
So should slaves turn to kings, kings turn to vipers,
Statesmen to pack-horses, soldiers to leeches,
Poets to apes, philosophers to owls,
Misers to magpies, whoremongers to sparrows,
And all things in a quick and whirling change
Of retributive life be still renew'd
Till the Great God, grown tir'd of the sport,
Let drop the strings that vivified his puppets;
Or fate should fling herself on nature's pile,
And dread Dulcarnon close and cancel all things!

Enter GENNARO, *unseen by* LUCRETIA BORGIA, *nor himself seeing her or the body of* MAFFIO.

GENNARO.

I come too late to share the festival;
The flasks are empty, and the guests are full.
With the intention came I to get drunk,
And for awhile be cheerful, even as they,
That by the merciful messenger deceiv'd,
Deem'd themselves victors, while they vanquish'd were,
And thus of happiness had one day more!
Well, 'tis a head-ache sav'd, and a night lost!
How the room reeks of food!—and he that hath
Fill'd his own appetite, turns up his nose,
And damns the odour of his neighbour's meat;

For selfish are we all, and most so they
That of a finer fabric boast to be,
Having the cracks and flaws of common clay——
(*Seeing the Duchess.*)
Oh, Heav'n! what dost thou here! whose presence can
Prognosticate no good?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Come from this place!

GENNARO.

Thy voice is hollow, and thine eyes are fix'd
On the impressless air, as though they gaz'd
Upon some terrible and 'trancing thing
That none beside could see! Speak, woman, speak!
What is it thou hast done?

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Come from this place,
And I will tell thee all things that have chanc'd.

GENNARO.

What, Maffio!—my gentle Maffio!
Why liest thou here? Speak to me, Maffio!
Speak to thy Gennaro,—speak but one word,
And tell me what thou ail'st.

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Forbear thy breath,
He cannot answer thee to whom thou talk'st.

GENNARO.

Oh, he is dead, and dead from other wounds
Than nature kills with! See, his lips are swoll'n,
His eye-balls stretch'd, and starting from his head;
His pale cheek blotch'd with black, as life and death
Still struggled in it for the mastery,
And from each corner of his manly mouth
Down trickle drops of thick and ropy blood!
Monster, this is thy work!

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

But, come with me;
I will make all things clear.

GENNARO.

All things are clear;
Death needs no dragoman! Oh, Maffio—
Sweet, slaughter'd Maffio! shall thy blood sink
Into the thirsty and oblivious earth
And no man reck 'tis spilt? Die in thy guilt—
Die, monstrous, murderous hag!
(*Offers to stab her.*)

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Slay me not, Gennaro!
Thou know'st not whom it is that thou wouldst slay;
This day I sav'd thy life.

GENNARO.

It is most true;
That word disarms my arm, and I am powerless!
Oh, subtle usurer! that didst tempt me to
Contract a debt for that I valued not,
And now, with the most precious thing I own'd,
Thyself hast thus extortionately paid!
God judge thee, woman, for man hath no code
To match with thy misdeeds; even as the wretch
That quench'd the life from which his own was lit,
Scap'd hanging for it for the want of laws!
Yet shalt thou not be baulk'd, good rapier,
But this thy scabbard be!

(*Points his sword to his own breast.*)

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

Hold—hold thy hand!
Gennaro, sweet Gennaro, be not thus rash—
Give me that fearful blade!

GENNARO.

Woman, stand off!
Thy life is sav'd for mine, and we are quits.
Frown not, dead Maffio! that I slay her not;
I'll pay thee with a dearer sacrifice;
Alone thou shalt not cross the gloomy gulf
That yawns betwixt the living and the dead,
Nor solitary sit in the grim boat.

Together were we prophesied to die,
And thus the halting destiny I'll help
To keep her credit up.

(*As he is on the point of killing himself, enter the* DUKE, *followed by* RUSTIGHELLO; *the* DUKE *rushes up to* GENNARO, *and stabs him.*)

DUKE.

That sin be spar'd thee—
For by no other weapon than by mine,
Once-respited minion, art thou doom'd to die!

GENNARO.

Fate's honourable, and hath kept her word;
I thank thee, Duke, for giving me that stab;
Thou art the very Freedman, that didst let
Forth the old lives of Rome!

(*Dies.*)

LUCRETIA BORGIA.

All's over now;
Here ends the hope; here breaks the pride of Borgia.
Husband, I blame thee not, that only didst
What thou didst think thee justified to do:
Whom thou hast slain, thou knowst not, nor shalt know;
Be that black secret buried in his grave!
For me, this scene and shifting canvas o'er,

In some strict nunnery, where loathliest food,
And lacerating stripes, and sack-cloth'd skin,
And days that know no peace, and nights no rest,
Shall feign a foretaste of the wrath to come;
Henceforward will I hide myself, and there
Anticipate the inevitable Hell!

(*The curtain falls.*)

THE END.

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